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ABSTRACT

Stimatizing attitudes and expectations toward mentally ill individuals often lead to their behavioral confirmation. To investigate attitudes and behaviors towards people described as seeking psychological counseling, 136 college students (68 males, 68 females) took part in a mixed-sex dyadic conversation. One dyad member was randomly chosen as the perceiver and the other member as the target. Perceivers received information concerning the client status of the target, and rated their impressions of the target on the Impression Formation Questionnaire (IFQ). After completing the IFQ subjects participated in a 10-minute tape recorded conversation. Following the conversation, targets completed a questionnaire on their impressions of the interaction. The behaviors of the dyad members were rated from the tapes by judges blind to the experimental conditions. An analysis of the results showed that subjects formed more negative initial impressions of "clients" than of "non-clients" and acted more negatively towards them. Furthermore, these perceptions and reactions influenced dyadic interactions in ways that led to their behavioral confirmation. The findings suggest that social interactions should be structured in a manner that will break down stereotypic conceptions, thereby interrupting the behavioral confirmation sequence. (BL)

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THE STIGMA OF COUNSELING: STEREOTYPES, INTERPERSONAL REACTION, AND THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Baltimore, MD, April 12-15, 1984.

(1) Title of poster: The stigma of counseling: Stereotypes, interpersonal reaction, and the self-fulfilling prophecy.

(2) Authors: Mark Sibicky and John F. Dovidio, Colgate University.

(3) Sponsor: Not applicable.

(4) Abstract: This research investigated attitudes and behaviors towards people described as seeking psychological counseling. As expected, subjects formed more negative initial impressions of "clients" than of "non-clients" and acted more negatively towards them. Furthermore, these perceptions and reactions influenced dyadic interactions in ways that led to their behavioral confirmation.

(5) Topical session preference: Social, Person Perception, Attitudes.

(6) Slides will not be used.

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(8) Sponsor's statement: Not applicable.

(1) Title of Paper: The stigma of counseling: Stereotypes, interpersonal reactions, and the self-fulfilling prophecy

(2) Topical Session Preference: Social, Person Perception, Attitudes

(3) Problem or Major Purpose: Attitudes toward the mentally ill have been characterized by rejection and stigmatization (Farina & Ring, 1965). Furthermore, people often expect an individual who is labeled as "mentally ill" to respond in a way consistent with that label. These expectations and subsequent behaviors then "push" the labeled person into responding in ways that conform to the intial impressions and lead to continued deviance (Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1966). This process is similar to what Merton (1957) and Jones (1977) define as the "self-fulfilling prophecy." Research on the self-fulfilling prophecy based on other identifiable group characteristics (e. g., sex and attractiveness) has demonstrated that stereotypes often influence interactions in ways that lead to their behavioral confirmation -- even to the extent of causing mistaken intial impressions to become real (Snyder & Swann, 1978; Zanna & Pack, 1975).

The present experiment investigated attitudes about persons seeking psychological therapy at a University Counseling Center. Moreover, the present study was designed to assess influences of social perceptions on dyadic social interactions. Using a procedure similar to that used by Snyder, Tanke and Berscheid (1977), previously unacquainted subjects interacted in a conversation in which one randomly chosen dyad member (the "perceiver") received information concerning the client status of the other dyad member (the "target"). It was hypothesized, based on research on attitudes toward the mentally ill and towards

people who seek counseling (Phillips, 1963), that the perceiver would form more negative impressions of the partner when the target was believed to be seeking psychological aid than when no mention was made about the target seeking therapy. Futhermore, it was predicted that the perceiver would interact with the target in ways that would lead to changes in the target's behavior that would confirm the perceiver's intial impressions.

(4) Subjects: Sixty-eight female and 68 male undergraduates participated in partial fulfillment of introductory psychology course requirements.

(5) Procedure: One member of each mixed-sex dyad was randomly designated as "perceiver" and the other as "target". To prevent subjects from meeting each other before their conversation, they were escorted to separate cubicles. Subjects, believing that they were in an experiment on the "acquaintance process," were asked to complete a biographical questionnaire that would be exchanged with their partner and would form the basis of a ten-minute getting-acquainted conversation. In the control condition, the experimenter simply asked the the perceiver to read the target's biographical questionnaire. In the experimental condition, the perceiver read the target's biographical questionnaire and was misinformed by the experimenter that the target was recruited from students who were seeking psychological therapy at the University Counseling Center. The target was unaware of the experimental manipulation.

Before the conversation, perceivers rated their first impressions of the target on a modified version of Snyder et al.'s (1977) Impression Formation Questionnaire (IFQ). After completing the IFQ, the subjects used microphones

and headphones to engage in a 10-minute getting-acquainted conversation (that was tape-recorded). At the conclusion of the conversation, targets were asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their impressions of the interaction. To evaluate the behaviors of perceivers and targets, two judges (blind to the experimental conditions) later separately rated the way the perceiver interacted with the target (which was recorded on one track of the tape) and the way the target interacted with the perceiver (which was recorded on the other track). Median interjudge reliablity was .69.

(6) Results or Findings: Preliminary factor analysis of the perceivers' initial ratings of the targets on the IFQ revealed five factors: Openness, Security, Character, Sociability, and Competence. In subsequent analyses of the IFQ, two-way (Client Condition x Perceiver Sex) multivariate analyses of variance were performed on items within each of these five dimensions. The analyses of perceivers' initial impressions of the targets (i. e., after the manipulation but before the conversation) demonstrated significant multivariate main effects for Client Condition on each of the five dimensions (see Table 1). As predicted, univariate analyses revealed that perceivers formed more negative initial impressions of "client" targets than of "non-client" targets. To assess whether perceivers' initial impressions of their partners actually affected how they interacted with targets, analyses were performed on the mean judges' ratings of the perceivers' behaviors during the conversations. As the multivariate and univariate analyses in Table 2 indicate, perceivers behaved in a more negative manner toward "clients" than toward "non-clients." Furthermore, targets themselves seemed to sense the difference. "Client" targets, compared to "non-client" targets, reported in their evaluations of the conversations that they felt less comfortable ($p<.01$), that they enjoyed the conversation less ($p<.01$), that the perceiver formed a less accurate impression of them ($p<.01$),

and that they were treated in an atypical manner ($p<.01$). To evaluate how the perceivers' expectations and actions affected targets' responses, judges' ratings of the targets' behaviors were also analyzed. Significant multivariate main effects for Client Condition were obtained on all five dimensions (see Table 3), and the univariate analyses revealed that "client" targets came to behave in a less socially desirable manner than did "non-client" targets. Across all of the analyses, there were no consistent effects associated with Subject Sex.

(7) Implications and Conclusions: Although past research has focused primarily on attitudes towards people institutionalized for mental illness, the present study suggests that simply seeking psychological aid at a counseling center may be stigmatizing. In fact, our results indicate that people perceive a person who seeks counseling in similiar ways as a person who is labeled as mentally ill. Perceivers intially rated "client" targets, as compared to "non-client" targets, as more unsuccessful, cruel, unattractive, and cold. These four items were selected for our impression questionnaire because past research (Crumpton, Weinstein, Acker & Annis, 1967; Nunnally, 1961) has shown them to reflect the public's attitudes toward the mentally ill.

Consistent with previous research on the self-fulfilling prophecy, perceivers' perceptions influenced dyadic social interactions in ways that led to their behavioral confirmation. That is, "client" targets, compared to "non-client" targets, came to act in relatively negative ways (i. e., defensive, shy, awkward, unsociable). Thus, one practical implication of the present research involves the public's attitudes and behaviors towards persons who utilize out-patient forms of mental health services. Research has shown that

targets may internalize "new" behaviors acquired through the behavioral confirmation process and exhibit them in other contexts (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Therefore, social interactions should be structured in a manner that will break down stereotypic conceptions (see Wilder, 1981), thereby interrupting the behavioral confirmation sequence, in order to prevent negative preconceptions of persons who seek therapy from undermining the psychological gains acquired through counseling.

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TABLE 1

Summary of Perceivers' Impressions of Target Before Conversation

	Factor and Item	Client means	non Client means	F	p	
	Factor I: Openess			(3.12)	(.010)	**
1	boring - interesting	4.02	4.38	1.91	.172	
2	shy - bold	3.17	3.70	4.92	.030	*
3	reserved - outgoing	3.23	4.02	9.39	.003	**
4	serious - humorous	3.47	3.50	.01	.916	
5	enthusiastic - unenthusiastic	3.17	2.52	7.17	.009	**
6	defensive - open	3.38	4.14	10.05	.002	**
	Factor II: Security			(3.79)	(.001)	**
1	strong - weak	3.41	2.97	3.35	.072	
2	sexually cold - sexually warm	3.47	3.82	2.49	.119	
3	self-assertive - submissive	3.29	2.88	2.57	.114	
4	boring - interesting	4.02	4.38	1.91	.172	
5	exciting - dull	3.50	3.02	4.30	.042	*
6	independent - dependent	3.00	2.52	3.45	.068	
7	sexually prohibitive - permissive	3.35	3.47	.40	.527	
8	poised - awkward	3.52	2.55	20.54	.001	**
9	physically attractive - unattractive	3.50	3.02	4.21	.044	*
10	secure - insecure	3.91	2.67	32.74	.001	**
	Factor III: Character			(2.05)	(.050)	*
1	sensitive - insensitive	2.64	2.38	1.25	.267	
2	egoistic - altruistic	3.55	4.02	4.66	.035	*
3	cruel - kind	4.47	4.82	4.08	.047	*
4	genuine - artificial	2.61	2.44	.61	.437	
5	vain - modest	3.97	4.08	.23	.633	
6	sincere - insincere	2.64	2.47	.77	.382	
7	cold - warm	3.79	4.44	11.84	.001	*
8	untrustworthy - trustworthy	4.17	4.47	2.75	.102	
	Factor IV: Sociability			(5.25)	(.001)	**
1	complex - simple	2.79	3.00	.69	.409	
2	unsociable - sociable	3.67	4.58	10.47	.002	**
3	sophisticated - naive	3.17	2.88	1.38	.244	
4	poised - awkward	3.52	2.55	20.54	.001	**
5	unconventional - conventional	3.52	4.17	6.34	.014	*
6	happy - sad	3.50	2.55	19.88	.001	**
7	secure - insecure	3.91	2.67	32.74	.001	**
	Factor V: Competence			(2.82)	(.030)	*
1	sophisticated - naive	3.41	2.97	1.38	.244	
2	rational - emotional	3.35	3.20	.35	.553	
3	unintelligent - intelligent	4.55	4.79	1.40	.241	
4	unsuccessful - successful	3.85	4.50	11.76	.001	**

* < .05
** < .01

TABLE 2

Summary of Judges' Ratings of Perceivers' Behavior During Conversation

	Factor and Item	Client means	non Client means	F	p	
	Factor I: Openness			(3.39)	(.009)	**
1	boring - interesting	3.15	3.93	12.50	.001	**
2	shy - bold	3.36	3.50	.33	.568	
3	reserved - outgoing	3.22	3.82	2.72	.106	
4	serious - humorous	3.45	3.58	.25	.613	
5	enthusiastic - unenthusiastic	3.84	3.15	4.31	.044	*
6	defensive - open	3.38	3.71	2.76	.104	
	Factor II: Security			(2.27)	(.038)	**
1	strong - weak	3.68	3.17	9.00	.004	**
2	sexually cold - sexually warm	3.40	3.89	8.55	.006	**
3	self-assertive - submissive	3.29	3.39	.40	.528	
4	boring - interesting	3.15	3.93	12.50	.001	**
5	exciting - dull	3.86	3.54	4.47	.041	*
6	independent - dependent	3.38	3.54	1.21	.277	
7	sexually prohibitive - permissive	3.61	3.65	.05	.815	
8	poised - awkward	3.77	3.26	4.34	.043	*
9	physically attractive - unattractive	3.40	3.08	4.85	.033	*
10	secure - insecure	3.54	3.15	3.26	.078	
	Factor III: Character			(2.77)	(.010)	**
1	sensitive - insensitive	3.70	2.97	20.06	.001	**
2	egoistic - altruistic	3.11	3.58	10.98	.002	**
3	cruel - kind	3.77	4.10	7.82	.008	**
4	genuine - artificial	3.68	3.04	9.99	.003	**
5	vain - modest	3.27	3.47	2.54	.118	
6	sincere - insincere	3.43	2.84	15.31	.001	**
7	cold - warm	3.06	3.97	9.83	.003	**
8	untrustworthy - trustworthy	3.72	3.97	4.77	.035	*
	Factor IV: Sociability			(3.90)	(.003)	**
1	complex - simple	4.00	3.36	14.43	.001	**
2	unsociable - sociable	3.45	4.52	13.70	.001	**
3	sophisticated - naive	3.52	3.23	3.38	.073	
4	poised - awkward	3.77	3.26	4.34	.043	*
5	unconventional - conventional	3.88	3.93	.15	.697	
6	happy - sad	3.63	3.04	8.89	.005	**
7	secure - insecure	3.54	3.15	3.26	.078	
	Factor V: Competence			(4.34)	(.005)	**
1	sophisticated - naive	3.52	3.23	3.38	.073	
2	rational - emotional	3.50	3.73	2.56	.117	
3	unintelligent - intelligent	3.79	4.19	11.34	.002	**
4	unsuccessful - successful	3.79	3.89	.66	.419	

* < .05

** < .01

TABLE 3

Summary of Judges' Ratings of Targets' Behavior During Conversation

	Factor and Item	Client means	non Client means	F	p	
	Factor I: Openness			(3.72)	(.003)	**
1	boring - interesting	3.23	3.80	15.17	.001	**
2	shy - bold	3.20	3.75	9.48	.003	**
3	reserved - outgoing	3.17	4.11	15.75	.001	**
4	serious - humorous	3.17	3.73	8.95	.004	**
5	enthusiastic - unenthusiastic	3.92	3.19	10.20	.002	**
6	defensive - open	3.27	4.01	19.43	.001	**
	Factor II: Security		(2.18)	(.033)	**	
1	strong - weak	3.48	3.22	3.70	.059	
2	sexually cold - sexually warm	3.48	3.98	11.19	.001	**
3	self-assertive - submissive	3.44	3.23	.63	.429	
4	boring - interesting	3.23	3.80	15.17	.001	**
5	exciting - dull	3.82	3.29	14.87	.001	**
6	independent - dependent	3.33	3.19	1.86	.177	
7	sexually prohibitive - permissive	3.47	3.79	7.51	.008	**
8	poised - awkward	3.95	3.10	15.36	.001	**
9	physically attractive - unattractive	3.51	2.82	16.22	.001	**
10	secure - insecure	3.79	2.98	10.61	.002	**
	Factor III: Character			(2.55)	(.020)	*
1	sensitive - insensitive	3.44	3.05	8.32	.005	**
2	egoistic - altruistic	3.23	3.57	6.42	.014	*
3	cruel - kind	3.94	4.00	.55	.457	
4	genuine - artificial	3.33	3.10	3.20	.078	
5	vain - modest	3.50	3.61	1.17	.283	
6	sincere - insincere	3.30	3.00	10.75	.002	**
7	cold - warm	3.22	4.00	14.44	.001	**
8	untrustworthy - trustworthy	3.79	3.86	.881	.351	
	Factor IV: Sociability			(5.59)	(.001)	**
1	complex - simple	3.79	3.07	22.73	.001	**
2	unsociable - sociable	3.33	4.39	25.08	.001	**
3	sophisticated - naive	3.54	3.22	7.07	.010	**
4	poised - awkward	3.95	3.10	15.36	.001	**
5	unconventional - conventional	3.82	3.76	.41	.522	
6	happy - sad	3.61	2.70	23.78	.001	**
7	secure - insecure	3.79	2.98	10.61	.002	**
	Factor V: Competence			(2.76)	(.035)	*
1	sophisticated - naive	3.54	3.22	7.07	.010	*
2	rational - emotional	3.52	3.52	0.0	1.00	
3	unintelligent - intelligent	3.86	4.19	7.90	.007	**
4	unsuccessful - successful	3.76	3.98	4.05	.048	*

* < .05

** < .01